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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ATHENS 000127

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [NATO](#) [MK](#) [GR](#)

SUBJECT: GREECE/MACEDONIA: GREEK NEGOTIATOR NOT OPTIMISTIC

Classified By: Ambassador Daniel V. Speckhard for 1.4 (b, d)

¶1. (C) Ambassador and DCM met January 24 with Ambassador Adamintos Vasilakis for a readout of the January 21 Ohrid negotiations on the Macedonian name issue, chaired by Matthew Nimetz. Vasilakis said that the opening remarks by FM Milososki contained some of the same "unhelpful" statements he subsequently made in his interview with Sky TV, and added nothing to the atmosphere. By contrast, the direct discussions between Vasilakis and Dimitrov were cordial. No new ideas were breached, said Vasilakis, that could contribute to the resolution of the main issue. There are potentially good ideas in the Macedonian-proposed confidence-building measures, but nothing which would build confidence that Skopje is now ready to discuss seriously a change of name. Vasilakis said he told Dimitrov that Greece does not seek to challenge the existence of his state or his people. Greece is only seeking a name for that state that reflects the reality that historic Macedonia is now contained in three different states.

¶2. (C) In an aside on Nimetz, Vasilakis said he had discouraged Nimetz from putting specific suggestions for a new name on the table at this time. He praised Nimetz's skill in the discussions, but noted that tabling a more specific proposal at this time ) before Skopje had accepted the Nimetz framework ) would hurt Nimetz' credibility with the Greek government, something Vasilakis felt he had a personal obligation to protect.

¶3. (C) Noting that he was giving us his briefing before he had personally spoken to either PM Karamanlis or FM Bakoyannis, Vasilakis gave us his view of the PM's political dilemma. Bakoyannis could not afford politically to come back from Brussels with a compromise that was less than a comprehensive, permanent solution to the issue, nor could Karamanlis return from Bucharest with an inadequate compromise. It would be seen across the Greek political spectrum as Greece having failed to use its one significant lever with Skopje, coupled with the expectation that Macedonia would continue to use time to avoid serious negotiations and wear down the Greek position. He acknowledged that a Greek veto before or at Bucharest would create a crisis in regional stability, adding to what could be a more serious crisis within Kosovo.

¶4. (C) Ambassador Speckhard pressed repeatedly for any willingness to consider outcomes other than a veto. He argued that Greece should "get what you can:" e.g., a permanent solution on the name to be used in NATO and all other international organizations, while leaving open for future negotiations other aspects of the issue. Vasilakis said that this would not be seen as a real step forward in Greece. There would continue to be a host of practical problems relating to documents, passports, etc., within and outside of NATO. More importantly, such an agreement could not be ratified in the Greek Parliament.

¶5. (C) Ambassador Speckhard said that the current dynamic

was not favorable to Greece. Although Karamanlis had courageously moved away from the long-standing position that the name could not include the word "Macedonia," there was still a perception in most NATO capitals that Greece was the inflexible party. Athens should seek to "change the dynamic;" give more flexibility and let Skopje be responsible for accepting or rejecting a Nimetz compromise. Instead of seeking a global solution to all aspects of the issue before Bucharest, go for one permanent solution at a time, focusing for now on NATO. Vasilakis said he had discussed such ideas with his political leadership, but "I was overruled."

¶6. (C) Ambassador Speckhard noted the February 14 meeting in Washington between Bakoyannis and Secretary Rice. He said Washington could bring more persuasive arguments to bear to help resolve the impasse if there was an indication from Athens that a solution - short of the comprehensive package Athens sought - was still attainable. Before the Washington meeting, Greece needs to do a realistic assessment of its interests, and make a judgment as to whether a veto will help or hinder the prospects for eventual resolution of this dispute.

¶7. (C) After Ambassador Speckhard's departure, DCM continued the conversation. They discussed the situation in Skopje, with Vasilakis arguing that there are signs that PM Gruevski is beginning to realize that he may suffer politically from the train wreck. DCM replied that our Embassy in Skopje saw no such signs: Gruevski - like Karamanlis - will enjoy a bump in popularity after a Greek veto, and Gruevski may take it to the bank in the form of immediate elections. The 'irredentism' which Greece perceives in the Republic of Macedonia would grow significantly, further delaying any meaningful communication

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or compromise between the two sides.

¶8. (C) DCM noted his personal judgment that a Greek veto was now inevitable. He suggested that it would be appropriate for Greece and the U.S. to discuss - before and during Bakoyannis' visit to Washington - the scenarios for the day after Bucharest, in three areas:

-- How NATO and its members can best provide security and stability both for Kosovo and within Macedonia, and how to ensure that the Macedonians don't lose interest in NATO membership.

-- How Athens and Skopje can manage the rhetoric surrounding the veto in a manner that preserves some hope of eventual dialogue and resolution of the issue.

-- How to respond to the Macedonian threat that, if Greece exercises its veto threat, it will take the name issue back to the United Nations. If both sides walk away from the U.S.-brokered Interim Accord, the U.S. will be obligated to re-assess its position.

¶9. (C) Comment: We are not receiving, from Vasilakis or anyone else, any indication that Greece is prepared to consider any alternative other than a comprehensive solution to the name or a veto of Macedonian accession. We will continue to press the GOG to make a rational assessment of its self-interest, not only politically, but also in terms of advancing rather than retarding its degree of understanding with Skopje. The next opportunity to do so should be in a January 31 meeting of Ambassador Speckhard with the Foreign Minister (assuming this still happens given this is likely the day of the Archbishop's funeral). End Comment.

SPECKHARD